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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 3686
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4214
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 3472
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 1663
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 4217
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1057
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1532
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 8087
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 5565
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0478
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 4599
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 6551
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9134
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000442

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OPRC KMDR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that Hamas vowed to use any means to breach the Israeli embargo on the Gaza Strip, hours before a planned mass rally in Gaza to protest economic sanctions against the Strip. As part of

the demonstration, the protesters are scheduled to march this morning toward the Erez crossing in the northern Gaza Strip. The organizers of the demonstration are planning a "human chain" which will stretch along the main highway running north to south in Gaza. The IDF has bolstered its forces along the border with the Gaza Strip, fearing that the rally's participants will try to break into Israel. Commanders have received orders to stop entry into Israel "by all means," including sniper fire against the legs of the demonstrators. The media quoted Defense Minister Ehud Barak as saying on Sunday that "Hamas is behind this activity that is intentionally placing the civilians at the front -- and not for the first time." "Israel does not intervene in demonstrations inside the Gaza Strip, but it will defend its territory and will prevent a breach of its sovereign borders," Barak added. "We are working to prevent a deterioration and we are making it clear that if something happens, the sole responsibility will be on Hamas." Other Israeli political and military leaders made similar comments. At midday Israel Radio reported that the Palestinian demonstration drew far fewer people than expected.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that the EU is playing an increasingly important role as Israel's "third pillar of survival" -- along with the IDF and the U.S.

All media reported that on Sunday the cabinet decided to invest 327 million shekels (about \$91 million) in the fortification of Sderot and other communities in the area by 2010. Over the weekend major media reported that thousands of Israelis heeded a call and thronged to Sderot on Friday morning to show their solidarity with the beleaguered town and to help prop up its faltering economy.

Ha'aretz reported that the Qatari PM and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamed bin Jassem al-Thani, told Knesset Member Yossi Beilin (Meretz)

in Doha on Sunday that Qatar is willing to broker a cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Foreign Ministry welcomed the creation by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators of three committees to deal with civil affairs issues: water and the environment; legal matters; and economic subjects.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli officials have dismissed as a "tempest in a teapot" reports from Arab League officials that the organization may withdraw its 2002 peace plan unless Israel explicitly accepts the initiative.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post quoted former Foreign Ministry director-general Alon Liel as saying in Washington this week that the obstacle to a peace deal with Syria is not Jerusalem but the U.S.

Leading media quoted FM Tzipi Livni as saying last night at the conference against anti-Semitism, which was held at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, that Israel would not take part in the second Durban Conference unless it is clear that it will not become a platform for anti-Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Livni further said that the participation of the international community in the first Durban Conference gave legitimacy to hatred, extremism and anti-Semitism.

Over the weekend, the media reported that on Saturday Israeli forces arrested Majdi Tzuibhi Qassam Mabruk, a senior member of the PFLP in Nablus. On Saturday IDF troops hit what they said was a mortar-launching cell. Several activists were struck during the weekend. Israel Radio reports that last night three Hamas activists were killed in two raids in Gaza.

On Sunday Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that over 20 activists were wounded on Friday in clashes with the IDF near the security fence at Bil'in. An American activist was among those wounded.

Ha'aretz reported on a rare decision by the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court: It has ruled that settlers be removed from the property of a West Bank Palestinian.

Senator Barack Obama's top aide, Samantha Power, was quoted as

saying in an interview with Ha'aretz that she does not believe in imposing peace. Power also rebuffed claims that her candidate is hostile to Israel. Ha'aretz reported that Senator Hillary Clinton won the Israel vote in the Democrats Abroad Global Primary (54% for Sen. Clinton and 45% for Sen. Obama). Obama captured a majority of the total votes cast by American expatriates worldwide in the ballot (66% for Sen. Obama and 33% for Sen. Clinton).

Maariv told the story of Amichai Biton from Chicago, whose father emigrated from Israel and who enlisted to serve in Iraq, where he fell this week.

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday Defense Minister Ehud Barak objected to PM Ehud Olmert's instructions to make it easier for border troops to open fire on anyone trying to cross into Israel illegally. On Sunday Olmert had ordered the defense establishment to step up efforts to prevent the illegal infiltration of job-seeking Africans into Israel through the border with Egypt.

I1. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "When the malice of Hamas meets the confusion of an Israeli government that has no solution to the Qassam rocket fire, the outcome means playing with fire."

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "If dozens or hundreds of thousands of Palestinians try to break into the Negev, the response needs to be indiscriminate gunfire into the masses in order to kill."

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom: "Now comes Hamas, the standard bearer of Palestinian brutality, and dons the mask of supposedly legitimate civil protest against the siege on Gaza."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Look closely at the picture of Israeli-Palestinian reality. Washington isn't in it."

Block Quotes:

II. "When Two Sides Play With Fire"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/25): "Hamas loves its fellow Palestinians, but it does not love them enough to refrain from sacrificing their lives for the sake of a political cause. The demonstration planned for today along the fence between Gaza and Israel is ostensibly intended only to sound the outcry of the besieged Gazans. If it deteriorates into a massacre, Hamas will proclaim its innocence: Only Israel's hands have spilled this blood.

The same duality exists on the Israeli side. Last night, the IDF issued an abundance of threats of fire aimed at the Palestinian side. The assumption was that only a show of brinkmanship would deter the crowd from trying to breach the fence. But as we learned in the events of the [Western Wall] tunnel and in October 2000, threats of fire could be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not only Hamas hears the IDF's threats. So too do the soldiers who are sent to stop the demonstrators. When the malice of Hamas meets the confusion of an Israeli government that has no solution to the Qassam rocket fire, the outcome means playing with fire.... There is, of course, another option: For the Israeli government to announce that the siege was a mistaken move, and that it has changed its mind. Such a possibility is completely within the realm of fantasy: The realistic people sitting around the cabinet table would prefer a thousand bullets to one small regret."

II. "Shoot Indiscriminately"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (2/25): "The Palestinians, encouraged by the breach of the Rafah border crossing, are likely to try to repeat their success at the Gaza Strip's borders with Israel. This threat must be met with a decisive Israeli response, with a clarification that cannot be misunderstood.... If dozens or hundreds of thousands of Palestinians try to break into the Negev, the response needs to be indiscriminate gunfire into the masses in order to kill -- not in the air, not in warming. Shoot to kill. As opposed to the relations between Egypt and the Palestinians, the Palestinians are Israel's enemies, not brethren. When enemies charge at you, you take aim and shoot in order to save your life, even if your enemies are women and children."

III. "On the Border of Danger"

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom (2/25): "Almost no one knows the name Mubarak Awad today, but 20 years ago he was a hot item in main newspaper headlines. Awad, a Jerusalem-born U.S. citizen, was an odd Palestinian bird who preached Mahatma Gandhi-style non-violence and Martin Luther King-style civil disobedience.... The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have looked completely different had the Palestinians adopted the Awad doctrine two decades ago, but they preferred to embrace the terrorist ideology and adhere to the principle of violence. In doing so, it could be argued, they condemned themselves to many more years of occupation. Now comes Hamas, the standard bearer of Palestinian brutality, and dons the mask of supposedly legitimate civil protest against the siege on Gaza. The organization intends to send thousands of mothers and children to the border in order to embarrass Israel and exploit what is perceived by the Palestinians as their great success in breaching the border with Egypt. It is possible to dismiss Hamas's sixties-style flower child masquerade as the height of chutzpah and the nadir of cynicism -- but we should not underestimate the magnitude of the danger. The difficult mission that faces the IDF today, on the assumption that the border march should indeed materialize, is to prevent the border from being crossed -- but also to refrain from a diplomatic downfall. One errant shell or an overly accurate salvo of shots could ignite a new fire in the territories, inflame the Arab world, entangle Israel in a complicated diplomatic crisis and grant the Palestinians a success of the kind that Awad could only have dreamed of."

IV. "Where's Dubya?"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/24): "Last week, [Condoleezza] Rice spoke of being frustrated by Israeli policy. Her aide, David Welch, said during a Quartet meeting that the U.S. 'was not comfortable with Israel's approach to Gaza.' Alas, the superpower is uncomfortable and frustrated, but it is also slothful..... Every U.S. presidential candidate can count on winning the Jewish voted as long as he or she extends blind support for Israeli policy, whatever it might be. There is a common assumption that Israel's peace policy is designed more to appease Washington than to achieve real peace. If not for U.S. pressure, Olmert would not have met with Abbas. This cuts both ways: If Bush did not oppose the prospect, Israel would now be deep in negotiations with Syria. The premise is amply demonstrated each time a senior U.S. officials comes to visit.

Like excited hamsters in their exercise wheel, a frenzied running begins, as if peace must genuinely be achieved by the end of 2008, or at the very least as if the American reaction is to be feared. This misleading premise has been in operation for far too long. Look closely at the picture of Israeli-Palestinian reality. Washington isn't in it."

JONES